Education, Design and Practice – Understanding skills in a Complex World

• Paper / Proposal Title:

“Pushing Boundaries” The ADU-TUW Students Workshop in Al Ain, UAE as Case Study of Collaborative Knowledge Exchange

• Author(s) Name:

Dr. Paolo Caratelli; Arch; David Calas; Arch. Maria Alessandra Misuri

• University or Company Affiliation:

Abu Dhabi University; Vienna University of Technology; Abu Dhabi University

• Abstract (300 words):

The Students Workshop hosted in Al Ain, UAE from January 31 until February 6, 2019 organized by Abu Dhabi University, Department of Architecture and Design (ADU) in collaboration with Vienna University of Technology, Institute of Architecture and Planning (TUW), completed an educational experience initiated during Fall semester 2018-2019 between the courses of Sustainable Design at ADU and Master Design Studio at TUW. During the semester, information about Al Ain’s urban structure, climate, and cultural context was shared between students via videoconference classes, in order to develop their project proposals for a hypothetical “Walking-Cycling Pathway connecting the Al Ain’s oases of Al Mutawaa, Al Mutaredh, and Al Muwaiji”. Therefore, the workshop in Al Ain represented a verification on field of design proposals elaborated separately as a proof-of-concept, and an opportunity of knowledge exchange. The two groups joined for an initial stage of field trips and visits where they immersed in a shared experience of UAE’s heritage, history, culture, and traditions. During the three-day laboratory, hosted by the Department of Culture and Tourism of Abu Dhabi at Al Qattara Arts Center, students worked in mixed groups between the two universities. The heterogeneity of cultural backgrounds and assimilation of UAE’s physical, cultural and social context emerged in their final projects analyzed in this
paper, mediated through the collaborative work and cultural exchange intervened between participants. This heterogeneous group of 21 students, belonging to 16 different nationalities from Europe and Middle East, represents an example how much cultural exchange and mutual understanding of traditions and social customs can work, not only for the betterment of the built environment but also in fostering the intangible values of our society as a whole. Furthermore, the international workshop represents an educational tool that should be integrated in curricula of architecture and design programs, both at undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Dr. Paolo Caratelli completed his Master in Architecture at University of Florence, Italy, where he obtained also his PhD in Architecture and Urban Design. Member of OAPPC (National Association of Italian Professional Architects and Planners) since 2000, he served as councilor in charge of Culture Department for Florence Chapter from 2004 until 2007. In Florence, he joined professional and academic activity, working with his own professional practice for private and public clients on residential, commercial, and infrastructural projects, and collaboratively with other architectural practices as well. At the University of Florence, he collaborated continuatively after his master degree and during his doctorate as assistant in design studios and co-supervisor in several master theses. He moved in UAE on 2008 as professional architect and Managing Director, working on several large architectural projects for private developers. On 2011 he joined Abu Dhabi University as Assistant Professor, then ranked Associate Professor since 2016. His research interests span from multidisciplinary aspects in architecture and urban design theory and practice, building retrofitting and sustainability, conservation of Modern architectural heritage, to human habitats in extreme environments. He is scientific committee’s member of Spatial Planning and Sustainable Development (SPSD) research community, and reviewer for several scientific publications.

David Calas, architect, urbanist, curator, founder of STUDIO CALAS and senior lecturer at the Technical University of Vienna – Faculty of Architecture, Austria, operates between the blurring boundaries of urban design, architecture, art and digitalization processes. After completing his Master in Architecture at TU Vienna, he pursued a practice related and research based activity, working in different international architecture firms as project lead, green-building expert (DGNB/LEED) and teaching architecture affronting imminent topics. The continuous involvement in academics and practice lead to the doctoral program, elaborating a mixed-methods thesis about the “Co-creation in the Digital Age”. Focus of his practice and research works is the relation of design and socio-cultural approaches, divulging findings in professional journals. He is MC Austria in the ongoing European COST-Action “Restore” and former member of the EU FP7 “Corpus – The SCP Knowledge Hub”.
Maria Alessandra Misuri, architect, designer and lecturer at Abu Dhabi University, is member of OAPPC (National Association of Italian Professional Architects and Planners) since 2008, and NCARB Tutor since 2011. Master graduated at University of Florence, Italy, her professional career started at “Fondazione Giovanni Michelucci” in Florence, involved in social architecture projects such as “Il Giardino degli Incontri”, the last developed by architect Michelucci for the State Prison in Florence, completed on 2007 and for which she received the UNESCO Award for the VI edition 'Design 21: Social Design Network’ the same year. She moved to UAE on 2008, appointed as Senior Architect working on private and public projects, and on 2011 was appointed by Perkins+Will Middle East as Associate Architect in charge for the new Hospitality Department, working on several high-end hospitality and residential projects. She joined Abu Dhabi University on 2014 as lecturer, with a focus on building technology and design studios, combined with creativity and investigation. Her teaching approach uses different methods, involving teaching and practicing as a connective fabric, focusing on how does teaching influences the practice of architecture and vice versa. At Abu Dhabi University she received the Distinguished Teaching Award for two consecutive years.